

Specification

CHEMICAL MECHANICAL POLISHING THICKNESS CONTROL IN MAGNETIC HEAD FABRICATION

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to chemical mechanical polishing (CMP) fabrication techniques, and more particularly to the use of a polishing stop layer to achieve CMP thickness variation control, with particular application to the fabrication of magnetic heads.

Description of the Prior Art

Various types of thin film devices, such as magnetic heads for hard disk drives, are fabricated in large quantities on a single substrate surface. Following fabrication the substrate is sliced, or diced to provide a large quantity of discrete devices for later incorporation into various component assemblies. In the thin film fabrication process various features of the devices are fabricated utilizing precise thin film deposition and/or removal techniques, and it is often necessary that the thin film layers be deposited on a flat surface. To achieve such a flat surface during a fabrication process, a chemical mechanical polishing (CMP) process step is typically undertaken. Such a typical CMP step involves the use of a wet slurry that is disposed on a large, flat, moving polishing surface or table. Slurry chemistries can be quite complicated, and generally include a water base with additives to provide a basic or acidic pH depending upon the chemistry of the thin films formed on the substrate, together with an abrasive material. Substrate surfaces to be polished are placed upon the slurry coated flat polishing table and the movement of the table and slurry acts to polish the substrate surface.

To achieve a good product yield from a substrate, it is desirable to have good process control of the CMP step. Problems exist in the prior art CMP process control in that it is often the case that the polishing rate varies across the surface of the substrate, typically polishing is greater towards the edges of the substrate than at the center. Additionally, variations in the chemical composition and/or physical distribution of the slurry across the polishing table surface can result in uneven polishing of the substrate. It is also important to control the polishing depth, that is, the thickness of material that is removed from the substrate surface. Because material removal rates can vary across the substrate, polishing substrates for a particular time period can result in unequal CMP material removal from different substrate areas. It is therefore desirable to have a means for determining when the CMP polishing step has proceeded to a predetermined depth and to achieve uniform polishing across a substrate surface.

The present invention solves these CMP processing problems by the inclusion of a thin film polishing stop layer in the substrate fabrication process. With such a layer it then becomes possible to achieve a more even substrate polishing across the surface of the substrate, as well as to determine when the CMP polishing step has removed the appropriate thickness of material from the substrate.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The method for controlling the depth of polishing during a CMP process involves the deposition of a polishing stop layer at an appropriate point in the device fabrication process. The stop layer is comprised of a substance that is substantially more resistant to polishing with a particular polishing slurry that is utilized in the CMP process than a polishable material layer. Preferred stop layer materials of the present invention are tantalum and diamond-like-carbon (DLC), and the polishable layer may consist of alumina. In one embodiment of the present

invention the stop layer is deposited directly onto the top surface of components to be protected during the CMP process. A polishable layer is thereafter deposited upon the stop layer, and the CMP polishing step removes the polishable material layer down to the portions of the stop layer that are deposited upon the top surfaces of the components. The stop layer is thereafter removed from the top surface of the components. In this embodiment, the fabricated height of the components is preserved.

In another embodiment of the present invention a first material layer is deposited following the fabrication of upwardly projecting components upon the substrate surface. A polishing stop layer is thereafter deposited upon the first material layer, and a polishable layer is then deposited upon the stop layer. In a subsequent CMP polishing step the substrate surface is polished down to height of the stop layer that is deposited upon the first material layer. Thereafter, the stop layer is removed. In this embodiment the height of the components is determined by the thickness of the first material layer. In the embodiments of the present invention the CMP end point is determinable by monitoring the electrical current of the polishing motor that is utilized in the CMP process.

In the CMP polishing method described above, the "components" can be magnetic pole pieces or induction coil turns of a magnetic head, or other components of recording heads, semiconductor devices or micro electrical mechanical systems (MEMS).

It is an advantage of the method for determining a CMP polishing end point of the present invention that uniform polishing of components across the surface of a substrate is obtained.

It is another advantage of the method for determining a CMP polishing end point of the present invention that a more uniform height for upwardly projecting components can be obtained during a CMP polishing process.

5 It is a further advantage of the method for determining a CMP polishing end point of the present invention that a CMP polishing end point can be more easily determined.

It is yet another advantage of the method for determining a CMP polishing end point of the present invention that component parts of magnetic heads that undergo a CMP process step can be more reliably fabricated.

It is yet a further advantage of the method for determining a CMP polishing end point of the present invention that the product yield of a plurality of components that are fabricated on a substrate which undergoes a CMP process step can be increased.

These and other features and advantages of the present invention will become well understood by those skilled in the art upon reading the following detailed description which makes reference to the several figures of the drawings.

IN THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a portion of a substrate surface during a fabrication process having a plurality of devices being fabricated thereon;

Fig. 2 is a side cross-sectional view taken along lines 2-2 of Fig. 1, diagrammatically depicting two such devices on the substrate surface of Fig. 1 during fabrication, which serves an
20 appropriate starting point to describe the present invention;

Figs. 3-6 depict further fabrication steps in a first embodiment of the present invention;

Figs. 7-13 are side cross-sectional views depicting fabrication steps of a second embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

A portion of a surface 24 of a substrate 10 having many devices 16, such as magnetic heads, being fabricated thereon is shown in perspective view in Fig. 1. As is well known, a chemical mechanical polishing (CMP) process step is typically conducted to planarize the substrate surface one or more times during a magnetic head fabrication process, and the present invention relates to methods for controlling the material removal from the substrate during a CMP process step, as is next described in detail and depicted in Figs. 2 - 13.

Fig. 2 is a side cross-sectional view taken along lines 2-2 of Fig. 1 that depicts two component features 20 of devices 16 that project upwardly from a surface 24 of a substrate 10. The component features 20 have a top surface 28 and are meant to generally include various different components of a device 16 that is being fabricated on the substrate 10, such as magnetic pole pieces, induction coil pieces, electrical interconnect pieces and the like, as well as other recording head components, semiconductor devices or micro electrical mechanical systems (MEMS).

In a first embodiment of the present invention, depicted in Figs. 3-6, it is the goal of the CMP process step to maintain the height h of the components 20 during a CMP process. As depicted in Fig. 3, the first step of the present invention is to deposit a protective CMP stop layer 32 upon the substrate surface 24 to particularly cover the top surface 28 of each component 20 on the substrate 10. Key features of the protective layer 32 are that it is composed of a substance that is highly resistant to the CMP polishing that will be conducted, and that it not involve chemistries that may contaminate or harm the device being fabricated. In the preferred embodiment, a protective layer 32 composed of tantalum or of diamond-like-carbon (DLC) has proven to be effective. The tantalum or DLC layer is preferably applied utilizing well known

sputtering techniques, and a protective layer 32 having a thickness of 200 to 500 Å is generally suitable. Where the layer 32 is composed of tantalum, a thickness approaching 500 Å is preferred, whereas when the layer 32 is composed of DLC, a thickness of approximately 200 Å is preferred. Because the tantalum or DLC layer on top of the component is subsequently removed, a thinner yet operable protective layer 32 is preferred.

Following the deposition of the protective layer 32, a polishable fill layer 40, composed of a material such as alumina, is deposited across the surface of the substrate. As depicted in Fig. 4, the alumina layer 40 is deposited to a depth d that is greater than the height h of the components 20, such that the top surface 44 of the layer 40 is above the height of the protective layer 32 on top of the component 20. Thereafter, as depicted in Fig. 5, a standard CMP process is undertaken to remove the excess alumina that is deposited above the height of the protective layer 32. The slurry of the CMP process is selected to have a strong polishing selectivity for alumina over the protective layer material. As is seen in Fig. 5, the protective layer 32 on top of the components 20 serves as a CMP process stopping layer. That is, due to the resistance of the layer 32 to the CMP polishing, the CMP polishing process is stopped by the layer 32 and the height h of the features 20 is protected from excessive polishing that might otherwise reduce the height h of the components 20. The polishing end point can be determined by monitoring the polishing motor current, which will decrease when the relatively hard protective layer 32 is reached. Thus, where uneven CMP polishing typically occurs in the prior art across the surface of the wafer, and results in polishing down some components 20 in excessively polished areas of the substrate surface, the protective polishing stop layer 32 preserves the height h of all of the components 20 across the substrate surface. Lastly, as depicted in Fig. 6, the portion of the protective layer 32 on top of the components 20 is removed. Where the protective layer 32 is

composed of tantalum, an ion etching process with argon or a wet etching process utilizing appropriate chemistries can be utilized to remove it. Alternatively a CMP process using a slurry that has a 1:1 selectivity for alumina/Ta can be used to remove the Ta stop layer. Where the layer 32 is composed of DLC, a sputter etching process or a reactive ion etching process with oxygen reactive species may be utilized to remove it, as well as a plasma ashing process using oxygen.

An alternative embodiment of the present invention is depicted in Figs. 7 - 13, and is utilized where it is desired to equalize the height of components fabricated upon a substrate surface. As is depicted in Fig. 7, two components 60 and 68 have been fabricated upon a surface 72 of a substrate 10. It is significant to note that the height l of component 60 is less than the height m of component 68. Thereafter, as depicted in Fig. 8, a fill layer 80, such as alumina, is deposited upon the surface of the substrate. It is significant that the thickness n of the alumina layer 80 is less than the height l of the component 60, and it is noted that material from the layer 80 forms a deposit 84 on top of the components 60 and 68.

Thereafter, as depicted in Fig. 9, a CMP stop layer 86 is deposited on top of the layer 80. As discussed hereabove, the CMP layer 86 is preferably composed of tantalum or DLC, and where tantalum is utilized the preferred layer thickness is approximately 500 Å, while when DLC is utilized the preferred layer thickness is approximately 200 Å. As seen in Fig. 9, the CMP stop layer 86 tends to be thicker on the horizontal surfaces 88 and thinner on the more vertical surfaces 90, and a top portion 92 of the stop layer 86 is deposited upon the projecting deposits 84. As is next depicted in Fig. 10, a polishable layer 94 is next fabricated on top of the stop layer 86. The layer 94 is preferably composed of a spin-on resist, which typically flows to create a relatively thick portion 96 in valley areas and a relatively thin portion 100 on top of the

projecting surfaces 92 of the CMP stop layer 86. Thereafter, as depicted in Fig. 11, an RIE process is conducted to remove the thin portions 100 of the layer 94 as well as the top portion 92 of the CMP stop layer 86 that was deposited on top of the deposits 84 above the components 60 and 68. Where tantalum is utilized as the stop layer 86, an ion etching removal process utilizing argon or CF₄ is conducted, whereas an oxygen species enhanced RIE removal process is used for a CMP stop layer composed of DLC. Other appropriate stop layer removal processes, as identified above, may also be used. After the top portion 92 of the CMP stop layer 86 has been removed, a CMP polishing step is conducted. As depicted in Fig. 12, the CMP step proceeds until the horizontal portions of the CMP stop layer 86 have been reached. The end point can be detected by monitoring the polishing motor current. At this point, it is significant to note that each of the components 60 and 68 has been reduced to the same height, that height being the thickness n of the alumina layer 80, plus the thickness of the CMP stop layer 86. In a last process step shown in Fig. 13, the remaining CMP stop layer 86 is removed. As indicated above, where the layer 86 is composed of tantalum, an ion etching process utilizing argon or CF₄ is utilized. Where the layer 86 is composed of DLC, an RIE process utilizing oxygen species is conducted, or, alternatively, a plasma ashing process utilizing oxygen may also be used. Other stop layer removal processes, identified above, may alternatively be used.

The present invention is not dependent upon the various standard CMP polishing compound chemistries, so long as the CMP stop layer 32 and 86 is substantially resistant to CMP polishing by the slurry. Tantalum and DLC have been specifically identified in the present invention because they are both significantly resistant to the standard CMP chemistries and therefore form good CMP stop layers. Additionally, with regard to DLC, it is a compound that has been commonly utilized in many fabrication processes, such that its use as a CMP stop layer

